



# Seek The Old Paths

*"Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths... and walk therein"*  
(Jeremiah 6:16)

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## WHY I LEFT THE MORMON CHURCH #5

*Nathan Franson*

**T**he Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is driven largely by a creed of thirteen "Articles of Faith." To see our ongoing examination of these "Articles," go to [seektheoldpaths.com/stop2014.htm](http://seektheoldpaths.com/stop2014.htm).

### FIFTH ARTICLE OF FAITH

The fifth item of the LDS Articles of Faith states, *"We believe that a man must be called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority, to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof."* In other words, in order to preach the Gospel of Christ and be active in that roll, men serving in authoritative positions in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints must ordain or confirm him. When I was a teenager, it included being interviewed by the Bishop of the ward (congregation) to see if I was ready and worthy to meet such an important "calling." He would ask personal and general questions before declaring me worthy.

Loren C. Dunn, who held a seat on the First Council of the Seventy, stated in a speech:

...This is part of the revealed procedure in the gospel of Jesus Christ, which takes place from the general to the ward or branch level and which allows every member the opportunity of sustaining a person who has been called to office...The

Lord, then, gives us the opportunity to sustain the action of a divine calling and in effect express ourselves if for any reason we may feel otherwise. To sustain is to make the action binding on ourselves and to commit ourselves to support those people whom we have sustained. When a person goes through the sacred act of raising his arm to the square, he should remember, with soberness, that which he has done and commence to act in harmony with his sustaining vote both in public and in private... A calling in the Church is both a personal and a sacred matter, and everyone is entitled to know he or she has been called to act in the name of God in that particular position. Every person in this church has the right to know that he has been called of God. If he does not have that assurance, then I would suggest he give his calling serious, prayerful consideration so that he can receive what he has a right to receive. (Dunn)

Mr. Dunn's speech is an adequate representation of the LDS beliefs on this subject. Notice the hierarchy, which determines the validity of the "calling."

**Where is Bible authority for any of these procedures?** Where is

the command, example or implication for these things? If it is the case that God calls a man to preach as Dunn admits, then why is that not sufficient? Why is there more needed, and why is it necessary for man to "sustain" anything, especially in such a ritualistic format?

Christ simply and directly told His disciples, *"...All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world"* (Matt. 28:18-20). The disciples were given the calling: go and teach. What were they to teach? Jesus said they were to teach everything He had commanded them. There was never a "confirmation" or "sustaining" ritual that preceded their preaching the Gospel or fulfilling the ordinances (laws). No one was called upon to lay hands on them. The only authority that was involved was Christ, and doing things in the name of the Godhead.

Consider the time after Christ defeated death and appeared to the eleven as they ate. He commands them, *"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature..."* (Mark 16:15). There is no mention or hint of the need for anyone "in authority" laying hands on them to preach. Who would have such

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**Why I Left...**



Editorial...

## THE END #1

Garland M. Robinson

The last week of the Lord's life was spent in Jerusalem. Luke 21:37 says that "...in the day time he was teaching in the temple; and at night he went out, and abode in the mount that is called [the mount] of Olives." On one such evening as Jesus "...went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings [are here]! And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (Mark 13:1-2; cf. Matt. 24:2; Luke 21:6).

In but few words, Jesus prophesies the complete and utter destruction of the temple. Nothing could perhaps seem more improbable to the Jews than this prophecy. How could it ever be that their beloved city and temple could be ransacked and completely demolished? Yet, in less than 40 years, the temple came down just as the Lord said. History records that the Roman Emperor Vespasian gave orders to besiege the city of Jerusalem and with his son Titus leading the army, destroyed it and the temple in 70 A.D.

Continuing out of Jerusalem, Jesus leads his disciples to a hill overlooking the city where he would spend the night. As Jesus "...sat upon the mount of Olives over against the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what [shall be] the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled" (Mark 13:3-4). Luke 21:7 records the same questions saying, "...Master, but when shall these things be? and what sign [will there be] when these things shall come to pass?" Matthew 24:3 adds a third question that Mark and Luke do not record. Here we read, "...Tell us, when shall these things be? and what [shall be] the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"

There is so much misunder-

standing and false doctrine regarding the Lord's teaching in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. The disciples had asked three questions: 1) "when" shall these things be? 2) what "sign" will there be when these things will be fulfilled? 3) what "sign" will there be concerning the end of the world? Though the third question is often combined with the second, the Lord answers it separately in Matthew 24. A clear and distinct separation is seen between the answer to question #2 in verses 4-35 of Matthew 24, and question #3 beginning in verse 36 and extending through the end of chapter 25. We will treat the disciples inquiry and the Lord's answer as three separate questions.

### THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM

Jesus uses this opportunity to tell his disciples to not be gullible and fall for just any and every teaching that comes along. Jesus admonishes them to take heed that no man lead them astray (Matt. 24:4). They, just like us, must use logic, reason, and investigation. First Thessalonians 5:21 says, "prove all things, hold fast that which is good." There would be many false christs who would lead many astray (v.5). In the next few years (less than 40) from the time Jesus spake these words, they would hear of wars and rumors of wars but were not to fear or be troubled about what they hear (v.6).

How fearful are so many, even today, by events going on in the world around us. As terrible and tragic as they are, the faithful in Christ Jesus take comfort in knowing that man cannot harm our soul (cf. Matt. 10:28). We work and pray, pray and work, that the Lord's will be done, as it is in heaven, so also upon the earth. Paul writes to Timothy saying, "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, [and] giving of thanks, be made for

all men; For kings, and [for] all that are in authority; **that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty**" (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

Jesus says that in their life time, in that generation (Matt. 24:33-34), "...there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places" (Matt. 24:7). Some would be afflicted and killed. Some would betray one another and hate one another (vs.9-10). Many would be deceived by false prophets (v.11). Wickedness, lawlessness, would multiply and increase. "The love of many shall wax cold. But **he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved**" (vs.12-13).

In Revelation 2:10, John writes, "be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." The point being, they, as well as us, must live faithful to the Lord even in the face of death. Neither persecution nor war nor natural disaster has any hold over the faithful. We may be caught up in the circumstances around us, but we are comforted in knowing we serve the true and living God. We must not "cave in" to the pressures and temptations of life. James says that trials and temptations come from both without (James 1:2-12) and within (1:13-16), but either way, we can overcome because we rest in the hands of a loving Savior (cf. 1 Peter 1:3-9; Psa. 31:19; 37:28; 55:22).

### THEN COMETH THE END

In verse 14 of Matthew 24 Jesus said, "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and **then shall the end come.**" While Mark (13:10) mentions the Gospel being preached in all the world, neither he nor Luke record the last four words of Matthew 24:14 where the Lord said, "then shall the end come."

It is assumed by so many today that the "end" refers to the end of time - the end of the world. But, an examination of the context in which this phrase is found won't allow it. The Greek word is *telos* and is defined by Thayer as "termination, the limit at which a thing ceases to be. Always of the end of some act or state." Vines defines it as "the limit, either at which a person or thing ceases to be what he or it was up to

that point, or at which previous activities were ceased.” It is used concerning the end of the law of Moses in Romans 10:4, “For Christ [is] the **end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.**” Brother James Boyd comments,

...Christ is the end of the law. The word “end” means goal, target, that which was in view. The coming of Christ was that toward which the old law pointed. “End” here is like the term “end” in First Peter 1:9, where Peter wrote, “Receiving the end of you faith, even the salvation of your souls.” The goal, target, that which is in view of faith, is salvation. In like manner, Christ was the “end” of the old law of Moses. It is the same thought here as in Galatians 3:23-25 which teaches the purpose of the law was to bring to Christ. (*System of Salvation, Comments on Romans*, Nov. 1990, p.150)

What “end” is under consideration in Matthew 24:14? It’s not the end of time because the earth is still standing. It’s the end of the Mosaic Age — the end of Judaism.

The system of Judaism, governed by the law of Moses, had come to its end. It had run its course and would be replaced with the Christian system (the Christian age). Even when the law of Moses had been delivered, it was revealed, “The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken” (Deut. 18:15). This passage is quoted by Peter as being fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Acts 3:19-26). “For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, [that] every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days” (Acts 3:22-24).

Nine hundred years after the giving of the law of Moses and six hun-

dred years before the time of Christ, Jeremiah foretold of the passing of the law of Moses (Jer. 31:31-34). It is quoted in Hebrews 8:6-13 as being fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The Lord came to put away the law of Moses and establish his new law. Hebrews 10:9 says Jesus came to take away the first (Old Testament) that he might establish the second (New Testament). “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross” (Col. 2:14). The “law was our schoolmaster [to bring us] unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (Gal. 3:24-25). The law of Moses accomplished that for which it was intended. “It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; [and it was] ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator” (Gal. 3:19). The “seed” that was to come was Jesus the Christ (v.16).

Both John the Baptist and Jesus taught things concerning the kingdom (church). “The law and the prophets [were] until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached...” (Luke 16:16). On the day of Pentecost, the Gospel was preached for the first time (Acts 2). The new law, the law of Christ, was made effective. The old law, the law of Moses, was done away. The events of Acts 2 were the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah and his new law. Everything prior to this chapter was looking forward to the events of this day. Everything after this chapter looks backward to this day. No wonder Acts 2 is called the “hub of the Bible.” So few understand this simple truth of God’s word.

The Jews of the first century did not understand, or at least would not accept, that Judaism had come to its end. It had fulfilled its purpose. It had ushered in the coming of the Messiah’s kingdom. The Mosaic system which had existed for 1,500 years has been replaced by a new and everlasting covenant (cf. Jer. 32:40; Heb. 13:20-21). The first covenant, the law of Moses, had become old, decayed, and consequently vanished away (Heb. 8:13). It was changed and disannulled (put

away, rejected) because of its weakness and unprofitableness (Heb. 7:12,18). It was merely a shadow of the New Testament (Heb. 10:1). The Lord took it (the First Covenant) away that he may establish the second (the New Covenant/Testament, Heb. 10:9-10). It was blotted out and taken out of the way, being nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14). It was a “school master” (escort, much like a school bus driver) to bring us to Christ and his new law (Gal. 3:24-15).

When the Messiah’s new law arrived (New Testament), the old law (Old Testament) was no longer needed. According to Romans 15:4, it’s in the Bible so we can learn great principles and examples of man’s interaction with God. It is not that by which the world is spiritually governed today. It does not teach us how to worship God and live righteously before him. The New Testament teaches us that. The law of Moses “...was added because of transgressions, **till the seed should come to whom the promise was made...**” (Gal. 3:19). The “seed” is Christ (Gal. 3:16). When Jesus Christ came, the law of Moses was done away.

The Jews as well as many others today refuse to see that the old law has been replaced with a new law. The New Testament is replete (overflowing) with point after point, argument after argument, showing the old was filled full and was replaced with the new. No clearer is this fact shown than in Galatians 5:4, “...whosoever of you are justified by the law (of Moses); ye are fallen from grace.” The entire book of Hebrews is given to show the superiority of the priesthood of Christ over the Levitical priesthood — Christianity over Judaism. It is a book to the whole world in general and Christians in particular that Christ and his church is the only right way.

Don’t abandon the Lord Jesus. Don’t give up on Him and his New Law. We’re on the right track. Hang on. Steady the course. Don’t forfeit salvation by going back into the world of hedonism, denominationalism, Judaism.

Part #2 next month

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## Elder's COLUMN

# MAY AND MUST A PREACHER DO THE WORK OF AN ELDER WHEN A CONGREGATION HAS NO ELDERSHIP?

*Douglas Hoff*

There are obviously two questions to consider here. The first deals with the issue of propriety (may) and the second deals with necessity (must). Notice, the primary question deals with whether it is scriptural for a preacher to perform the work of an elder when he is not one. The question was stated precisely. It was not asked whether a preacher “can” do the work of an elder. Many preachers likely possess the ability to accomplish the peculiar tasks God requires of elders. The real question is whether preachers are authorized by the Scriptures to do what is often asked of them — especially in small congregations that lack elders. This issue will be addressed in more detail later in this article.

This brings us to the second question. Is it a practical necessity for a preacher to act as an elder for a congregation that does not have appointed elders? A fair number of Christians seem to think so. I base this statement on what I have experienced as a preacher and what other preachers and members of the church have told me. Of course, if the answer to the first question is “No, a preacher is not scripturally allowed to do the work of an elder unless he is one of the elders,” then the matter of whether he “must” act as an elder has already been answered. At least, it has been settled for those who respect the authority of God’s word (cf. Col. 3:17). Unfortunately, there is sometimes a big difference between what people may expect (or even demand) of a preacher and what the Scriptures actually authorize him to do.

In my 25+ years of preaching, I have had dealings with over 100 churches throughout the country. These congregations spanned from the east coast to the west coast and from the far north to the south as well as the heartland. I have worked with

about a dozen churches on a regular basis. Some I worked with as the full time preacher. Others I served on a part time basis or itinerant basis (as needed). I have worked with very small churches to mid-sized congregations in the suburbs and cities. Some had elderships but most did not. The remaining 90 or so churches were ones where I conducted Gospel meetings, helped with Vacation Bible Schools or had an interview for the preaching work. This last category represented the majority of the remaining 90 churches.

As part of the interviewing process I was often asked to answer questionnaires dealing with doctrinal, moral, and practical matters pertaining to the particular congregation and their unique situation. Most of the questionnaires spent a lot of space on the expectations the members have of the preacher’s work. Far too often, the job description they gave sounded exactly like that of most denominational “pastors.” This is not the way it should be (cf. James 3:10)!

A lot of people in the congregations had some very strong opinions about what a preacher should do for them. If I tried to point out that their expectations were unscriptural, they often got upset. Some do not want to compare their beliefs with the word of God. Instead, they look for ways to justify their long held beliefs. If anyone should want to ensure his faith pleases God, it would be the true Christian. This means studying the Bible to see what God wants us to know, believe and do rather than looking into the Holy Scriptures to justify our preconceived ideas. Sometimes, if I told a congregation their expectations were not in harmony with God’s word, a number of their prominent members accused me of being unwilling to work hard. Some did not state it explicitly. Remarks were made that

implied it or strongly hinted this was their belief. However, if God does not authorize a preacher to do what some members expect and demand, it is not true the preacher is lazy. He is simply honoring divinely imposed roles and restrictions. This point is often missed or not truly appreciated during such discussions.

Why do so many members think preachers *must* function as an elder (pastor) in a congregation that has no eldership (and many times even if they do)? For some, it may be leftover baggage acquired from a denominational church background. This source is undeniable and quite understandable. However, those who carry such baggage with them after conversion need to search the Scriptures to see if such things are right in the sight of God (cf. Acts 17:11).

Sadly, far too many in the Lord’s church embrace the denominational “pastor” concept. Where did they learn it? Not from the Bible! God’s people have a sad tradition of mimicking those who practice false religion (1 Sam. 8; esp. vs.4-7, 19-20). Long ago, the prophet cried out, “*My people love to have it so*” (Jer. 5:31)! This practice needs to be challenged because it is not aligned with the Scriptures.

Members who want a denominational “pastor” fail to understand and distinguish the Biblical work and qualifications of elders, deacons and preachers. This is obvious whenever men are suggested as potential candidates for the eldership. Countless men have been suggested as potential elders or deacons who are not even married! Even a casual reading of 1 Timothy 3:1-15 shows that both elders and deacons must be married men. If church members know the Scriptures so poorly that they recommend bachelors as potential elders and deacons, is it any wonder they fail to understand the work of elders, dea-

cons and preachers?

When Christians are ignorant of God's word, it should not surprise us they will argue the preacher *must* do the work of the elders in a congregation that has no qualified men appointed to form an eldership. There are probably several attempted justifications. Perhaps the most often cited is that if the preacher will not do the work of the elders, "The church will die!" This is nothing but pragmatism. Pragmatism is the philosophy of "If it works, do it!" The word pragmatism is defined as "action or policy dictated by consideration of the immediate practical consequences rather than by theory or dogma." So, if a preacher is willing to disregard divine roles and limits in hopes it will "build the church," then, according to the pragmatists among us, not only *may* the church demand such of the preacher, they *must*. However, this does not please God!

The several sound schools of preaching with which I am familiar correctly teach that preachers must not exercise "evangelistic authority" (oversight) of the congregation in the absence of elders. God's wisdom is to have a plurality of qualified men involved in leading, feeding and protecting the flock. How could it possibly be pleasing in God's sight to allow one

man (the preacher) who may or may not be qualified to serve as an elder to oversee, guide, and rule the church? Yet, far too many preachers (new as well as experienced ones) become *de facto* elders for the congregation with which they work. Why might that be? Pressure from members with their expectations may be the reason.

Is there any overlap in the work of elders, deacons, preachers and every member of the church? Of course there is. But, does this fact mean preachers may step in and serve as elders if none have been appointed? No, because they have no authority from God to do so!

Preachers are Christians first and foremost. As such, they have the same responsibility to engage in visiting the sick (Matt. 25:36), teaching the lost (Acts 8:4) and encouraging the weak (1 Thess. 5:14) just as every other Christian does. Sound and faithful preachers will respect the divine arrangement and not seek to do what is not theirs to do.

What are some of the unique responsibilities of elders that a preacher should not strive to do? To answer this, it is important to realize the primary work of the elders must be viewed as that which they do as a unit. Individual elders have no more authority than does any other Chris-

tian. However, when elders function as a cohesive unit for the good of the body, they truly act in their divinely appointed roles of shepherds (pastors) to feed, guide, protect, and defend the flock (Acts 20:28-31; 1 Peter 5:1-3). There is also the need to rescue strays who have wandered from the fold. Overseeing the Lord's church is the responsibility of scripturally qualified men who have been appointed to this work. In the absence of a plurality of such men, it makes no sense to give this vital work to one man just because he may know the Scriptures better than the average member.

Far too many Christians fail to trust God. Our Lord gave His church a perfect plan. When members want to circumvent the divine pattern and try to justify such in the name of survival or practicality, they reveal their lack of faith in the Lord's wisdom and the power of His word. Expecting and demanding preachers to do the work of elders is sinful, foolish and ultimately destructive. That is one way the true church is gradually transformed into something that bears only a faint resemblance to the Lord's church pictured in the New Testament.

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## Why I Left...

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authority and where would they get it? They were sustained by the Word itself and the commandment of the Lord. Additionally, the only confirmation mentioned were the miracles they performed that confirmed, as genuine and authoritative, that which they preached.

The apostle Paul, who labored continuously for the kingdom of God, imparted sound teaching to Timothy: "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 2:2-3). There is nothing mentioned about "laying hands" on him, though he did teach him. There was no ceremony or ritual. Timothy was told to take what he had learned from Paul,

which was the Gospel of Christ, and teach it to faithful men so they could teach others. The word "faithful" is derived from the Greek word *pistoj* (*pistos*) which means "trusting" or "agreeable". Certainly that is the case when the Great Commission is fulfilled today. The Gospel will not be received by those who are unwilling to hear and heed it.

In another part of the same letter Paul tells Timothy, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2). There was no ritual, no formality, no special ceremony. Paul told him to preach and Timothy was expected to do it. The only authority came from the One whose doctrine he was to preach.

There are so many instances throughout the inspired writings of the New Testament that allude to preaching and teaching, yet none require someone in an authoritative

position to "lay hands on" and "confirm" men before they are able to preach and teach. Individuals were simply taught and became Christians upon their repentance, confession of Christ, and being baptized into His name, they were added to His church (Acts 2:38,41,47). The only time laying on of hands is mentioned in the New Testament (in an evangelistic context) is when the apostles would bestow miraculous gifts to one or more. Its purpose was to confirm the glory of God and God's power. Since the days of miracles have ceased (1 Cor. 13), we must be careful not to add something to God's word that is not there.

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# JESUS IS THE SHEPHERD OF THE PSALM

William Boyd

The 23rd Psalm is said to be the best known and most loved piece of literature in the world. In his book (Sermons, Chapel Talks and Debates) A. G. Freed said, "For lofty sentiment, sublime thought, and striking imagery, this psalm is unsurpassed. The authorized version (KJV) of this psalm, given to us in the Golden Age of English Literature, will live as long as the English tongue is spoken."

It is a psalm of fifteen lofty themes and for every phrase there is a corresponding statement made by our Lord in the New Testament.

It is a psalm of *God's gentle care* — "The Lord is my shepherd." Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11).

It is a psalm of *contentment* — "I shall not want." Jesus said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).

It is a psalm of *rest* — "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures." Jesus said, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matt. 11:28).

It is a psalm of *peace* — "He leadeth me beside the still waters." Jesus said, "Peace be still" (Mark 4:28).

It is a psalm of *life* — "He restoreth my soul." Jesus said, "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray" (Matt. 18:11-12)?

It is a psalm of *leadership* — "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27).

It is a psalm of *death* — "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death." Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life, he

that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whoso liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this" (John 11:25-26)?

It is a psalm of *courage* — "I will fear no evil." Jesus said, "Fear not little flock" (Luke 12:32).

It is a Psalm of *companionship* — "For thou art with me." Jesus said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20).

It is a psalm of *comfort* — "Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." Jesus said, "Daughter, be of good comfort, thy faith hath made thee whole" (Luke 8:48).

It is a psalm of *providence* — "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." Jesus said, "I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves...fear them not" (Matt. 10:16,26).

It is a psalm of *favor* — "Thou anointest my head with oil." Jesus said, "Blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it" (Luke 11:28).

It is a psalm of *abundance* — "My cup runneth over." Jesus said, "These things have I spoken unto you that your joy might be full" (John 15:11).

It is a psalm of *blessings* to follow — "Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

It is a psalm of *immortality* — "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Jesus said, "Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:1-3).

Jesus is the shepherd, the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 4:5), the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls (1 Peter 2:25), the good shepherd (John 10:11). The church is his flock. Paul

said to the elders of the church of Ephesus (Acts 20:28), "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."

Jesus said of the good shepherd in John 10:4, "the sheep follow him, for they know his voice." And in John 10:16 He said, "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd." That is one church. If you are in the one fold, you are in the one church. You get there by following the voice of the good shepherd.

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# CAN WE THINK LIKE GOD THINKS?

*Rusty Stark*

Some would say, “Obviously not! We are human, God is deity. We are weak, God is powerful. We are ignorant, God is omniscient. We are finite, God is infinite in all his attributes.”

But the Bible not only teaches that we can think like God thinks, it demands we do so. Unfortunately, one major passage that teaches this has been so misused and misunderstood by so many that it is used to teach just the opposite. Isaiah 55:6-9, *“Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*

I have misunderstood and misused this passage. Most people I have ever heard quote from, refer to, or otherwise use this passage have misused it. I’m not smarter than everyone else; I may not be smarter than anyone else. But just as someone pointed out to me the true meaning of this passage, let me humbly point out a more accurate view of Isaiah 55:6-9.

## WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

First, this passage gives no credence to the damnable idea that we can never understand the Bible because the Bible was written by an infinite God. Why would an infinite God write an unintelligible book? Wouldn’t an omniscient, omnipotent God be capable of communicating with lesser beings?

To be fair, it must be admitted that most preachers who use this verse don’t use it in support of this false doctrine anyway. Instead, they use it to say that we must not insist on understanding why God demands the things he demands, and that we

must not question God since he is so far above us.

While this is a true sentiment, it is not found in this passage. This passage is not saying that we will never understand God’s thoughts nor walk in his ways. This passage means just the opposite.

## WHAT IT MEANS

Look at the statements of verses 7 and 8 in their context. In verse 6, Jehovah emphasizes that He is near. In this sense we are reminded of Deuteronomy 29:29-30. There are secret things that God has not revealed. But there are revealed things that allow us to know what God wants of us.

Notice Deuteronomy 30:11-14, *“For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.”*

God’s word is not so far away from us that we can never grasp it. It is near us. It was given to us. Paul says to Timothy, *“And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”* (2 Tim. 3:15).

In verse 7, the wicked and unrighteous man is called away from two things: his own thoughts and his own ways. His own thoughts and ways are sinful. God can pardon one’s sins if he will turn from them.

Question: If the wicked and unrighteous man is rebuked for his thoughts and ways and called to forsake and turn from them, to what should he turn? Answer: He must turn to God’s thoughts and God’s ways (see verse 8).

In verse 8, what is wrong with

the thoughts and ways of the wicked? Answer: They are not God’s ways and thoughts. This is not because it is inevitable that our thoughts and ways cannot be God’s thoughts and ways. It is a sign of our wickedness. Sinful man is condemned for not walking in God’s ways and thinking God’s thoughts.

In verse 9, we learn how far the wicked have strayed — How low the unrighteous have fallen! God’s ways are as far away from the wicked and unrighteous as the heavens are above the earth. Not because God wants it that way. Not because it cannot be any other way. But because the wicked and unrighteous are thinking their own thoughts and walking in their own ways. This is what the passage is trying to change.

## THE CHALLENGE

It is a challenge to the wicked and unrighteous person to walk in God’s ways and to think God’s thoughts. It is true that we are limited, and that in some ways we will never be able to think like God thinks. But if we turn away from our own ways, we can think like he does about sin (1 Peter 1:16). We can love like he loves (1 John 3:16-17; 4:7). We can forgive like he forgives (Eph. 4:32). God’s word tells us what to think and how to live. We can do that. We can be faithful. Jesus died to make it so.

If we are failing to be like God in these things, Isaiah 55:6-9 is demanding that we turn from our own thoughts and our own ways. We are to think like God thinks and walk in God’s ways.

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